Celebrating MLK Day Where Many Leaders Have Tread

What better place to celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day than at a place and with people that were near and dear to his heart have come and gone. I had the pleasure of attending the Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Breakfast at the Historic Dorchester Center in Midway, Georgia, on January 16, 2010 with several members of the Midway Congregational Church. This gathering is a longstanding tradition in the community that gathers leaders from all over Liberty County, GA. For me, it is a much newer, but revered, tradition, since I have attended five out of the last eight years. This year's theme was "Back to the Basics ... Doing the Right Things." The speakers, prayer leaders and musicians all reminded us that, though many of the dreams of Dr. King have come true, all Americans still face challenges in combating racism and improving the lives of those who live at the margins in our country. Master of Ceremonies, The Honorable Gary Gillard, County Commissioner of District 5, evoked applause when he said, "We've had Dr. King. We have President Obama. However, we have always had Jesus. ... Trust me, when a man with a Muslim name can soundly defeat a decorated war hero during a time of two wars to become President of the United States, we HAVE overcome!" In a poem by Langston Hughes recited by Ms. Kimberly Robinson, listeners were reminded, in the words of the Spiritual, to keep their hand on freedom's plow and to hold on. Keynote Speaker, The Honorable Verdell Jones, Liberty County Board of Education, District 1, reminded us of some of the challenges that still lie before us. There is still a high number of teenage pregnancies, school dropout rates, and the fact that more African American young men go to jail than to college, and challenged us to continue Dr. King's legacy by doing all we can to overcome these social issues.

Mrs. Deborah Robinson accompanied Rev. Kathy Clark at the event. Mrs. Robinson of Midway Congregational Church, Midway, GA, was recognized as a Volunteer of the Year with the Georgia Association of Museums and Galleries on January 22, 2010. Mrs. Robinson is a graduate of the Theology Among the People (TAP) program, a retired teacher and church musician, and an active member of Midway UCC. She was recognized for her work at the Dorchester Academy African American History Museum, which is housed on the grounds of the former American Missionary Association School on property shared with the church. Mrs. Robinson, who recently celebrated her 80th birthday, is a leader and vital force in her local congregation and community.

The Dorchester Center, where the breakfast is held each year, is the last remaining building of the Dorchester Academy, a school established by the American Missionary Association for the education of the children of recently emancipated slaves following the Civil War. After the school was closed in the 1950s, the building, which is on property immediately adjacent to Midway Congregational UCC, became a community center. The Rev. Dr.

Andrew Young established a Citizenship School there during the Civil Rights Movement. Dr. King visited at least once a month to teach, study, pray, play, and plan. The bedroom in which he slept has recently been restored to its original state. Dr. King often visited the Dorchester Center for rest and relaxation as well as strategic planning during the Civil Rights Movement. Many members of the Midway Congregational Church in Midway remember participating in meetings with Dr. King, preparing food for gatherings when he visited, and remember seeing him playing volleyball on the grounds of the Center.

In the words of one speaker, "Midway is a history making place." History continues to be made there as members of the church and community continue Dr. King's legacy of non-violent engagement to improve the lives of African American citizens, and all citizens, through their leadership and outreach programs. For more information on the Dorchester Academy and its famous guests visit: http://www.dorchesteracademy.com/index.html